

as well, but no breakdown of local party committees or civil war–like strife between the Red Guards and the bureaucrats ever happened. Was Chinese socialism a completely different system? Such comparisons may be one way to go beyond the national framing of a social history of socialism.

From a transregional and global history perspective, one may ask more generally if a social history of state socialism beyond the national level is (im)possible. The outside world does appear in the book: many of the ideas behind and some of the concrete concepts of classification were taken from or influenced by the Soviet example. Regarding the “New democracy” and its end in 1953, the author mentions the possibility that the Chinese development was influenced by a broader dynamic in the Soviet bloc and even earlier in the international communist movement (p. 55). General lines of the PRC’s nationality policy, all differences notwithstanding, were derived from the Soviet model of multiethnicity, including an “invisible”, unmarked norm (of Russianness in the Soviet case and of the Han in the Chinese case). There are hints in the book at early PRC engineers who had been educated in the USA, but one may also ask about the social impact of the Soviet and Eastern European specialists in China and the Chinese going abroad to study in Moscow to learn as interns in Leuna or to supervise the construction of factories in Southeast Asia or North Korea. Maybe the number of passports for travelling abroad was negligible (p. 39); however, cross-border mobility could be another marker for social distinction, and the impact may be larger than what the limited numbers of travelling people can tell.

Thus, the book has the potential to lay the groundwork for a future transnational social history of state socialism. In this undertaking, the separated area studies of Eastern Europe and East Asia/China have to come together, and Wemheuer certainly has already earned a large degree of merit in that sense.[2] Nevertheless, there is still a long way to go in writing a global history of state socialism, and Wemheuer’s social history of China under Mao is a must-read in this undertaking, not least for scholars of the Soviet bloc who want to get a more global picture of what Cold War state socialism was.

Notes:

- 1 G. E. Schroeder, *The Soviet economy on a treadmill of reforms*, in: *Soviet Economy in a Time of Change*, ed. by US Congress, Joint Economic Committee, Washington, DC, 1979, pp. 312–340.
- 2 See, for example, F. Wemheuer (ed.): *Machterhalt durch Wirtschaftsreformen. Chinas Einfluss auf die sozialistische Welt* (= *Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung*), Berlin 2020.

**B. M. Jain: *The Geopsychology of International Relations in the 21st Century: Escaping the Ignorance Trap*, Lanham et al.: Lexington Books, 2021, 249 S.**

Reviewed by  
Hartmut Elsenhans, Leipzig

This book is a summary of the scientific work of B. M. Jain, an eminent scholar

and a prominent analyst of contemporary international relations. Jain has authored a long list of publications that deal primarily with US and Chinese strategies and their impact on South Asia. His work is, to some extent, indicative of the disillusionment of the secular nationalism of the Global South. The flourishing of this force was once celebrated as an achievement of Western modernization, which supposedly culminated in the decolonization of the Third World. This book comprises an honest recognition that mainstream American international relations theory has little to say about the processes and forces that are leading, and will continue to lead, to continued global conflict. This conflict will play out predominantly between the West and a diminishingly Westernized Global South and within the Global South itself. The book is structured around a core theoretical argument. This argument is tightly linked to an analysis of the causes of the demise of US cultural and increasingly also political influence in the Global South. It is thus, by implication, an analysis of the rise of newly dominant nation-states following in the wake of China. As Jain puts it, “Contemporary International Relations theory [...] is ‘insufficient’ to explain the dynamics of bloody violence, ethnic conflicts, civil wars and also to illuminate those underlying conditions that might trigger peaceful changes in a violent world order [...] Western International Relations theory has ignored the importance of psycho-cultural peculiarities of the masses and ruling elites from South Asia, the Middle East, and Afghanistan – the epicentre of conflicts and terror-ridden activities” (pp. IX–X).

The theoretical introduction to this book defines an alternative approach, characterized by the author as “geopsychological theory”. This approach is subsequently developed in five case studies that comprise “a mirror that exposes gaps, loopholes, and flaws in foreign policies disconnected from cultural moorings, urges, narratives, and dispositions of external powers” (p. 207). The book thus advocates “a new ‘research agenda’ in International Relations” that will “take cognizance of the psychological preponderance in the thinking and behavioural patterns of nonstate and dictatorial actors” (p. 208).

Jain argues that both academics and political decision-makers have to change in order to avoid the escalation of conflicts. As he observes, “the United States squandered trillions of dollars on worthless wars, which were avoidable had U.S. policy hawks first cared to learn about the Middle Eastern region’s history, its geographical terrain, its cultural ethos, its rationalism, and its ruling leadership’s moral resolve” (p. 173). From Jain’s point of view, the obstacle to such an undertaking lay in the militarization of US foreign policy. The author sees this militarization reflected in mainstream Western international relations theory, with its privileging of questions around material power (p. 173).

But as Jain suggests, an enlarging of the focus of interest to the psychological realm is crucial. There is a need to develop “a concise, coherent, workable framework of analysis to explain the behaviour of non-state and authoritarian actors, including communities, in terms of wielding a substantial leverage to influence the currents and crosscurrents of world politics” (p. 12). However, in developing such a pro-

gramme of knowledge creation, the author only provides a list of relevant fields: culture, history, nationalism, geography, and religion (pp. 27–34). The relation between these realms is not clarified. This is apparent from Jain's conceptualization of the role of geography: "Each geographical region represents a narrative woven in national and local identity among the mass of inhabitants" (p. 34). There is no mention here of the mediation of such geographical factors through, for example, religion or ethnic nationalism.

Perhaps, too, any attempt to address the neglected social and historical embeddedness of international relations carries with it an inevitable eclecticism. This is amply reflected in the five case studies. These deal with conflicts on which the author has published extensively and on which he is a recognized expert. Two of these case studies focus on South Asian powers: India and Pakistan. One analyses the relations between them, while the other focuses on their competing attempts to neutralize or enhance religious factors in the foreign policy behaviour of Middle Eastern states with respect to the Indo-Pakistan conflict. Another case study deals with the perceptions of the Chinese leadership of their own role in the world. It reveals a widespread conviction among China's leaders of the necessity of correcting the previous humiliations of China by the colonialist/imperialist powers. Two case studies deal with the misadventures of the United States. They focus specifically on various failed attempts to denuclearize North Korea and on unsuccessful efforts to export "Western values" into the Middle East by waging or threatening war.

In these case studies, leading decision-makers are presented as the key actors. They are generally conceived of as mouth-pieces for a humiliated nationalism. Leading figures serve as representatives of these feelings against dominant powers. For the Middle Eastern countries, North Korea, or China, these "dominant powers" are the West and particularly the United States; for the case of Pakistan, it is India. These feelings are characterized as totally new forces that increasingly shape the international world.

The book offers no discussion of the organization or structural shape of these psychological forces within the respective countries. Their unique and apparently recent emergence is more postulated than systematically discussed. An alternative, less culturalist reading of events might hold that such "geopsychological" forces lay behind radical episodes of decolonization, such as in Vietnam, Algeria, or Cameroon, as well as the post-colonial emancipation of countries such as Egypt. "Geopsychological" factors also surely exist and have long existed in the industrialized countries of the West. Before 1945, German nationalism, not only in its fascist form, was profoundly shaped by the resentment of past humiliations. This gives us cause to doubt the notion that newly emerging non-state actors and their new types of nationalism constitute a recent or uniquely non-Western phenomenon. Indeed, the rise of new populist forces in the West itself, often in similarly deprived and suffering social spheres, raises further questions about this contention.

The book depicts leading decision-makers – especially the Americans – as lacking insight into the perspectives of their op-

ponents. Indeed, it has been shown that limited empathy played a major role in historical escalations and arms races. This was not only so in the case of nuclear escalation during the Cold War but also more generally in the post-democratization interstate rivalries of the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries.

The book thus represents a most welcome critique of mainstream Western arguments about international conflict and of their complementary constructivist demands for “appropriate learning”. Mainstream International Relations constructivists argue

that such learning will apparently lead to a mutually beneficial and universal Westernization – a most quixotic proposition. By contrast, Jain privileges an approach very familiar from contemporary history writing. He serves to demystify the applicability of mainstream international relations theory for understanding major conflicts in the Global South and between the South and the West. His book thus makes an important contribution to the deconstruction of a dominant discourse that has its origin in the unipolar power politics of the post-Cold War world system.